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THE COMING
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SILVER SPRINGS.

FLORIDA
ATTRACTIONS.

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Marks, M. R.

A DESCRIPTION

-OF-

SILVER SPRINGS,

ONE OF THE DELIGHTFUL

NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

-OF-

FLORIDA.

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SILVER SPRINGS.

About six miles nearly east of Ocala, the county seat of Marion county, and midway between the Atlantic ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, is situated the famous Silver Springs—the finest spring beyond a doubt on the American continent. It is situated in the midst of a fertile and attractive region, and is at once the wonder and admiration of all who visit it.

Until recently it has been difficult of access on account of its remoteness from railroads. The Oklawaha river steamers or overland wagon transportation were the only means of reaching this delightful retreat. Recently the property has come into possession of A. D. Johnston, who proposes to make valuable improvements thereon. One line of railroad is already completed to the Springs, running through Ocala, and only about twenty minutes ride from that place. Two lines are built to Ocala. These lines of railroad and the river steamers afford tourists ample means of reaching the Springs. Ocala, the county seat of Marion, is the liveliest little town in the State, and she is as progressive as those which are larger. The town is growing rapidly, the building disease has become epidemic and the sound of the hammer all over the town is the indication when the eye doth not see that the work is going on.

Prospectors and spyers-out of the land are arriving daily, and sometimes it becomes a serious question how to accommodate them.

That which, however, has given push and impulse to this pleasant town of intelligent citizens is the railroad of Mr. Yulee. Reaching this place last spring, it is pushing its way rapidly south on the Washington survey, and as fast as time, money and labor can push it on to its various termini down the peninsula. And now the Florida Southern is coming here, a narrow gauge, which, like a loose colt, is prancing around every man's door, through every town it pleases, and goeth wherever it listeth, and there is no penning it or halting it or heading it off. With capitalland pluck, without parallel in the history of railroads in our State, it is making its way to every inland center of trade, and is destined to become one of the most important factors in the development of our country.

Ocala, already in possession of the various churches, with able and accomplished ministers, is giving her attention to the building up of a first-class school, with her accustomed energy and generous liberality. In a few weeks the question of a good school will be definitely settled, and persons locating here will be assured of all the religious and educational advantages a first-class town should possess.

The most noticeable point on the Ocklawaha is the Mirror of Diana, or Silver Springs, which is the source of this river, where, from the depths of some invisible cavern, boils up a large body of water, gathered from far away, forming a succession of springs nine miles in length, with an average depth of thirty-five feet. These waters rise from the subterranean depths of the earth, with their crystal

streams pure as an angel, clear as the nooday sun, bright and beautiful as the radiance of heavenly light. This spring is to the campers and movers who travel through the country what Jacob's Well was to the land of Samaria. It is entirely surrounded by trees, forming columns unknown to draughts or plans of architectural skill, except the great Architect of the universe. More than thirty years since, the land around this spring was entered as a homestead by a relative of that memorable martyr, John Rogers. Mr. Rogers, with whom we had the pleasure of conversing, said its present appearance was the same as when he first saw it—the water being so clear that looking down in it appeared like the sky above it: he could see no difference in depth, look which way he would, up or down. The basin is lined with a grayish limestone, which lies in ledges on the bottom, from under the crevices of which dart out patriarchal fish of immense size; but no hook, however delicately baited and concealed, can lure them to bite. They are occasionally captured with lines by striking, which custom was practiced by the Indians, "while graceful poised they throw the spear." At midday the sunbeams kiss the placid surface of this crystal fluid, while they are reflected by the transparent waters, which tremble and shimmer with resplendent glories.

A sunset viewed from this Mirror of Diana fills the imagination with emotions of grandeur, to be remembered as past joys, where descriptive powers are inadequate to the task. The parting rays of old Sol shine upon the vast forest of tall trees, draped with Spanish moss suspended in mid-air, resembling the fragile texture of some fairy realm more than a tangible substance; or when twilight deepens, then the stars raise their eyelids, and peep into the depths of

this land-locked mystery, which reveals nothing of its past history, age, or origin.

The following description of Silver Spring, written by Prof. John Le Conte, although entirely divested of myth and mystery, contains truthful facts that continue to invest it with a charm which stirs the current of our thoughts as no other natural scenery in the State :

"This remarkable spring is situated near the center of Marion county, in the State of Florida, in latitude $29^{\circ} 15'$ north, and longitude $82^{\circ} 20'$ west. It is about five miles east of Ocala, the county seat, and nearly in the axis of the peninsula, being equally distant from the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Its waters are discharged by a short stream bearing the same name, which after running about six miles, unites with the Ocklawaha, a tributary of the St. Johns River. The stream takes its origin in a deep pool, or head basin, which is called the Silver Spring. This basin is nearly circular in shape, about two hundred feet in diameter, and surrounded by hills covered with live oaks, magnolias, sweet bays, and other gigantic evergreens. The amount of water discharged is so large that small steamers and barges readily navigate the Silver Spring, up to the pool, or head spring, where there is a landing for the shipment of cotton, sugar, and other produce. These steamers and barges make regular trips between the Spring and Palatka, on the St. Johns. The boatmen informed me that at its junction with the Ocklawaha more than one-half of the water is contributed by the Silver Spring stream. This stream, for about two miles from its source, varies in breadth from forty-five to one hundred feet, and its depth in the shallowest parts from ten to fifteen feet, its average velocity being about two miles per hour. The fluc-

tuations of water level in this spring seem to be connected with the seasons of rains, but never varying more than two feet. The commencement of the rainy season changes from the 15th of June to the 15th of July. The waters of the spring begin to rise about the middle of the season of summer rains, and attain their maximum height about its termination. The maximum depth of water in the basin constituting the head of the spring was found to be not more than thirty-six feet in the deepest crevice from which the water boils up; the general depth in the central and deep parts of the basin was found to be about thirty feet. Inasmuch as accurate quantitative determinations, however easily applied, are seldom resorted to by the unscientific, we need not be surprised that its real depth falls very far short of its reputed depth. In South Carolina, the reported depth was variously stated at from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and fifty feet, while the smallest estimate in the vicinity of the spring was forty-five feet! This affords an illustration of the general law, that the accuracy of popular statements bears an inverse proportion to the distance from the point of observation—probably, like all emanations from centers, following the law of inverse squares.

“Doubtless, the greater portion of the water which flows in the Silver Spring River is furnished by this principal or head-spring; but there are several tributary springs of similar character along the course of the stream, which contribute more or less to the volume of water. These usually occur in deep basins, or coves, along the margin of the stream. The depth of one of these coves, situated about two hundred yards below the head-spring, was found to be thirty-two feet in the crevice in the limestone bottom.

from which the water boiled ; in other deep parts of the basin the depth was about twenty-four feet. The 'Bone-yard,' from which several specimens of mastodon bones have been taken, is situated two miles below the head-spring, it being a cove, or basin, measuring twenty-six feet.

"The most remarkable and really interesting phenomenon presented by this spring is the truly extraordinary transparency of the water—in this respect surpassing any thing which can be imagined. All of the intrinsic beauties which invest it, as well as the wonderful optical properties which popular reports have ascribed to its waters, are directly or indirectly referable to their almost perfect diaphaneity. On a clear and calm day, after the sun has attained sufficient altitude, the view from the side of a small boat floating on the surface of the water, near the center of the head-spring, is beautiful beyond description, and well calculated to produce a powerful impression upon the imagination. Every feature and configuration of the bottom of this gigantic basin is as distinctly visible as if the water was removed, and the atmosphere substituted in its place.

"A large portion of the bottom of this pool is covered with a luxuriant growth of water-grass and gigantic moss-like plants, or fresh-water algæ, which attain a height of three or four feet. The latter are found in the deepest parts of the basin. Without doubt, the development of so vigorous a vegetation at such depths is attributable to the large amount of solar light which penetrates these waters. Some parts are devoid of vegetation; these are composed of limestone rock and sand, presenting a white appearance. The water boils up from fissures in the limestone; these crevices being filled with sand and comminuted limestone, indicate the ascending cur-

rents of water by the local milk-like appearance produced by the agitation of their contents.

"These observations were made about noon, during the month of December—the sunlight illuminating the sides and bottom of this remarkable pool, brilliantly, as if nothing obstructed the light. The shadows of our little boat, of our hanging heads and hats, of projecting crags and logs, of the surrounding forest, and the vegetation at the bottom, were distinctly and sharply defined; while the constant waving of the slender and delicate moss-like *algæ*, by means of the currents created by the boiling up of the water, and the swimming of numerous fish above this miniature subaqueous forest, imparted a living reality to the scene which can never be forgotten. If we add to this picture, already sufficiently striking, that objects beneath the surface of the water, when viewed obliquely, were fringed with the prismatic hues, we shall cease to be surprised at the mysterious phenomena with which vivid imaginations have invested this enchanting spring, besides the inaccuracies which have been perpetuated in relation to the wonderful properties of its waters. On a bright day the beholder seems to be looking down from some lofty air-point on a truly fairy scene in the immense basin beneath him—a scene whose beauty and magical effect is vastly enhanced by the chromatic tints with which it is enclosed.

"Popular opinion has ascribed to these waters remarkable magnifying power. In confirmation of this, it is commonly reported that the *New York Herald* can be read at the deepest parts of the pool. It is almost needless to state that the waters do not possess this magnifying power; that it is only the large capitals constituting the heading of this paper which can be read at the bottom, and that the extra-

ordinary transparency of the water is abundantly sufficient to account for all well-known facts. A variety of careful experiments were made, with a view of testing this point, by securing printed cards to a brick attached to a fathom line and observing at what depth the words could be read when seen vertically. Of course, when looked at obliquely, the letters were distorted and colored by refraction. Numerous comparative experiments were likewise executed in relation to the distances at which the same cards could be read in the air. The results of these experiments may be announced in a few words—namely, that when the letters are of considerable size—say a quarter of an inch or more in length—on a clear, bright day, they could be read at about as great a vertical distance beneath the surface of the water as they could in the atmosphere. In some instances cards were read by those ignorant of the contents at depths varying from six to thirty feet. The comparative experiments in reading the cards in air and water serve to convey a more distinct idea of the wonderful diaphanous properties of the latter than any verbal description.

“Some have thought there was something mysterious in the fact that objects beneath the surface of the water, when viewed obliquely, are fringed with prismatic hues. It is unnecessary to remind the physicist that such a phenomenon is a direct physical consequence of the laws of dispersion of light by refraction. Observation has proved that white objects on a dark ground were fringed with blue at the top, with orange and red at the bottom, while the color of the fringing was reversed for dark objects on a white ground—this being exactly in accordance with recognized optical principles. In the present case, the phenomenon is remarkably striking and

conspicuous, probably from two causes : first, because the extraordinary transparency of the water rendered subaqueous objects highly luminous ; and secondly, because the gigantic evergreens which fringed the pool cut off most of the surface reflection, which would otherwise have impaired the visual impression produced by the more feeble refracted and dispersed rays proceeding from the objects—the shadow of the surrounding forest forming a dark background, analogous to the black cloud on which a rainbow is projected.”

The following legend, which appeared in the *National Repository*, seems so much in keeping with what might have been a reality, we have copied it for the benefit of those who are fond of legendary tales :

“A long time ago, when Okahumkee was king over the tribes of Indians who roamed and hunted around the South-western lakes, an event occurred which filled many hearts with horror. The king had a daughter named Weenonah, whose rare beauty was the pride of the old man’s life. Weenonah was exceedingly graceful and symmetrical in figure. Her face was of an olive complexion, tinged with light brown, her skin finely transparent, exquisitely clear. It was easy to see the red blood beneath the surface, and often it blushed in response to the impulses of a warm and generous nature. Her eye was the crystal of the soul—clear and liquid, or flashing and defiant, according to the mood. But the hair was the glory of the woman. Dark as the raven’s plume, but shot with gleams of sacred arrows, the large masses, when free, rolled in tresses of rich abundance. The silken drapery of that splendid hair fell about her ‘like some royal cloak dropped from the cloudland’s rare and radiant loom.’ Weenonah was, in truth, a forest belle—an idol of the braves—and

many were the eloquent things said of her by the red men when they rested at noon, or smoked around the evening fires. She was a coveted prize, while chiefs and warriors vied with each other as to who should present the most valuable gift, when her hand was sought from the king, her father. But the daughter had already seen and loved Chuleotah, the renowned chief of a tribe which dwelt among the wild groves of Silver Springs.

"The personal appearance of Chuleotah, as described by the hieroglyphics of that day, could be no other than prepossessing. He was arrayed in a style suitable to the dignity of a chief. Bold, handsome, well-developed, he was to an Indian maiden the very ideal of manly vigor. But it was a sad truth that between the old chief and the young, and their tribes, there had long been a deadly feud. They were enemies. When Okabumkee learned that Chuleotah had gained the affections of his beloved child, he at once declared his purpose of revenge. A war of passion was soon opened, and carried on without much regard to international amenities; nor had many weeks passed away before the noble Chuleotah was slain—slain, too, by the father of Weenonah.

"Dead! Her lover dead! Poor Weenonah! Will she return to the paternal lodge, and dwell among her people, while her father's hand is stained with the drippings of her lover's scalp? No; she hurries away to the well-known fountain. Her heart is there; for it is a favorite spot, and was a trysting-place, where herself and Chuleotah met. Its associations are all made sacred by the memories of the past, while on the glassy bosom of the spring the pale ghost of Chuleotah stands beckoning her to come. 'Yes, my own, my beloved one, I come. I

will follow where thou ledest, to the green and flowery land.' Thus spake the will, if not the lips, of the maiden. It is not a mere common suicide which she now contemplates; it is not despair, nor a broken heart, nor the loss of reason; it is not because she is sick of the world, or tired of life. Her faith is that by an act of self-immolation she will join her lover on that spirit-plain, whose far-off, strange glory has now for her such an irresistible attraction.

"The red clouds of sunset had passed away from the western skies. Gray mists came stealing on, but they soon melted and disappeared, as the stars shone through the airy blue. The moon came out with more than common brilliancy, and her light silvered the fountain. All was still, save the nightwinds, that sighed and moaned through the lofty pines. Then came Weenonah to the side of the spring, where, gazing down, she could see on the bottom the clear, green shelves of limestone, sloping into sharp hollows, opening here and there into still profounder depths. Forty feet below, on the mass of rock, was her bed of death—easy enough for her, as before she could reach it the spirit must have fled. The jagged rocks on the floor could therefore produce no pain in that beautiful form. For a moment she paused on the edge of the spring, then met her palms above her head, and with a wild leap she fell into the whelming waves.

"Down there in the spring are shells, finely polished by the attrition of the waters. They shine with purple and crimson, mingled with white irradiations, as if beams of the Aurora, or clouds of a tropical sunset, had been broken or scattered among them. Now, mark those long, green filaments of moss, or fresh-water algæ, swaying to and fro to the

motion of the waves; these are the loosened braids of Weenonah's hair, whose coronet gives in such beautiful coruscations, sparkling and luminous, like diamonds of the deep, when in the phosphorescence of night the ocean waves are tipped with fire. These relics of the devoted Indian girl are the charm of Silver Springs. But as to Weenonah herself—the real woman who could think and feel, with her affections and memory—she has gone to one of those enchanted isles far out in the western seas, where the maiden and her lover are united, and where both have found another Silver Spring, amid the rosy bowers of love eternal.”

Thus runs the Indian legend of Silver Springs, in Florida.

All this portion of Florida is rapidly developing, and the time is not far off when it will be one of the wealthiest and most fashionable resorts to be found anywhere. Mr. Johnston, the present proprietor of Silver Springs, has purchased a tract of land of about four hundred and sixty acres, including all the head of the spring. Upon this tract is an orange grove of seven hundred and fifty trees, four hundred of which bloomed last year, and are about coming into bearing.

Arrangements are now making to erect a large and commodious hotel at the Springs. Plans for the buildings have been drawn, and its completion is but a question of a brief time. This done, the splendid tract of land adjacent to and embracing the Springs will be subdivided into lots suitable for pleasant cottages and villas, and sold out to those who want attractive homes in Florida.

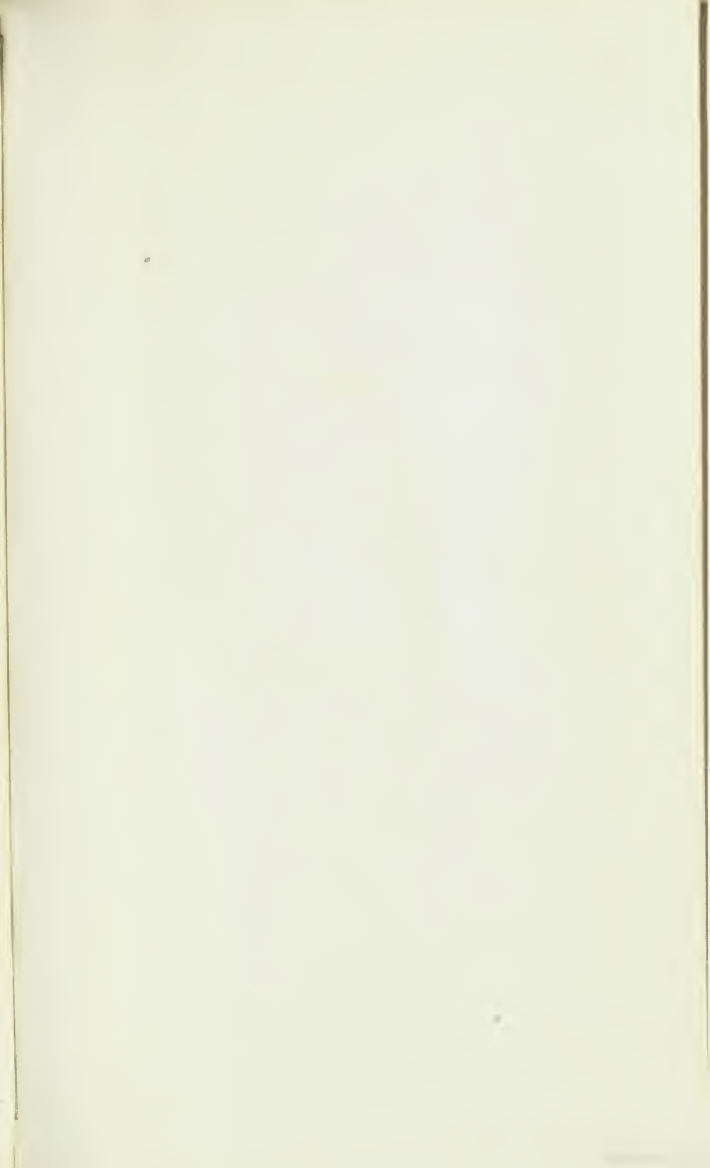
To northern capitalists who want quiet winter homes where the climate and all the conditions are favorable to relaxation from business cares, where

the expense of living is moderate, where society is the most refined and fashionable, this development of Silver Springs offers a rare opportunity.

With a few years more of prosperous development South Florida is destined to become one of the wealthiest and most attractive regions in the world. Her fine and equable climate, pure air, pure water, fine and profitable groves of semi-tropical fruits, health-giving springs, all invite a dense population and the investment of capital. People from the North and from the Old World are already waking up to the magnificent possibilities of the Peninsula State. Choice spots are being picked out for elegant homes, and money lavishly expended to embellish and develop them. A few years more and the attractive localities will be owned and improved by wealthy people, and Florida will be transformed from a cattle range to a tropical garden. When this shall come to pass, Silver Springs will be the bright particular spot whose attractions will win thousands.

For further particulars address,

M. R. MARKS,
Orlando, Orange Co., Fla.





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